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ABSTRACT

In the study reported here, 133 subjects (Ss) were selected randomly from one elementary school. Ss were showed photographs of Bushmen performing daily activities and asked to predict whether a Bushman would prefer specific indigenous customs or their American equivalents, and then to justify the prediction. Scores for three types of predictions and five types of justifications were comapred across six age groups. All Ss tend to predict Bushment prefer their way to ours; 11 year olds do so more than 6 year olds. Older Ss use cultural relativism more than primary grade Ss, who use ethnocentric reasoning more than older Ss. (Author/JLB)

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Purpose

New curricula in social studies introduce children to the study of foreign peoples quite early. Materials deal implicitly or explicitly with values of American students but foreign customs and values are either treated as exotic novelties or are ignored or shown to be like ours. Little attention has been devoted to finding out what American students think foreign peoples attitudes and value preferences are. If children in the preoperational state (Piaget and Inhelder, 1948) can not describe a doll or a model mountain from another perspective, perhaps first graders can not imagine that foreign societies may have different preferences from their own. The purpose of this study is to describe behavior of children in the six elementary grades in A) predicting the values of a non-western society and B) in supporting their predictions.

Method

Instrumentation

Four sets of questions were written to correspond with data presented in photographic form in A Bushman Family (Urell, n.d.). In each set, students were first asked to make a factual statement about specific Bushman customs (e.g. Name one kind of food Bushmen eat.); students were then presented with a choice between two cultural patterns (one Bushman the other American) and asked to guess which pattern a Bushman would prefer; finally students were asked to explain why they think a Bushman would prefer the pattern the child selected.

Responses to value-prediction questions were classified by two judges into one of three categories; No Prediction, Predicts Preference for American Pattern and Predicts Preference for Native Pattern. Responses to Justification of Prediction questions were classified as one of the follwing: Uses Cultural Relativism, Uses Objective Criteria, Uses Ethnocentric Criteria; No Justification, but Predicted Bushman preference for Bushman patterns; and Can't Classify. The final category was necessitated by the fact that some individuals offered justifications which might have been Ethnocentric

or Objective but the child's intent was unclear. Inter-scorer reliabilities on these classifications ranged from 1 to .68, using Pearson's r.

Subjects

133 children were selected randomly within classrooms at a single middle-class suburban elementary school. This sample represents the different age groups (6-11 years) at this school, but the degree to which it represents a wider population is a matter for conjecture.

Procedure

Each S was showed the booklet of photos with text obliterated, told the photos show how Bushmen live, and allowed to leaf through the booklet for three minutes. Then the booklet was opened to prescribed pages and questions were asked orally. The interviewer recorded answers as given and asked no probing questions.

Responses were coded by judges and a frequency-of-use score was generated for each S on each of the 8 response types. Then individuals were grouped by age in years and mean scores for each response type were compared across age groups by analysis of variance. A second computation of ANOV on the 8 response types compared performance of primary grade students (6, 7, and 8) with that of intermediate students (9, 10, and 11).

Findings

Mean frequency-of-use scores for each age group on three types of value predictions are reported in table 1. Mean frequency-of-use scores on the six types of support for predictions are reported on table 2. The highest possible score in both tables was 4. Only one difference between extremes ($p = .05$) was detected, this difference existed in "Uses Cultural Relativism" as justification. When comparisons were run between primary and intermediate

Table 1

Mean Use Scores on Prediction

Response	Age 6	7	8	9	10	11
Predicts Native Value	2.83	3.20	3.43	3.55	3.42	3.52
Predicts U.S. Preference	1.00	.77	.57	.45	.58	.43
No Prediction	.17	.00	.00	.00	..00	.05

Table 2

Mean Use Scores of Justification Types

Response	Age 6	7	8	9	10	11
Uses Cultural Relativism	.44	.93	1.00	1.18	1.32	1.48
Uses Objective Criteria	1.22	1.07	1.30	1.32	1.74	1.29
Can't Classify	1.00	1.13	.96	1.00	.47	.81
Uses Ethnocentrism	.89	.70	.57	.50	.42	.38
No Support, Native Predic.	.44	.13	.17	.00	.05	.00

ages, however, significant differences appear in "Predicts Native Pattern," "Uses Cultural Relativism," "Uses Ethnocentrism" and "No Support, Native Prediction." Clearly, developmental trends are present in use of the idea that each culture has its own perceptions and values; in the ability to verbalize this concept; and in the ability to control personal preferences in imagining what others value.

Conclusions

These findings are tentative, and do not indicate what students might do after instruction in these tasks. However these data provide an idea of what children may be expected to do with no assistance.

It is interesting, in light of Piaget's work, that so many first graders predict that Bushmen prefer their ways over ours. Perhaps children learn to use transitivity in social contexts before they can verbalize their reasoning and earlier than they use it in the description of physical objects.

Whatever the theoretical implications, use of cultural relativism seems well developed at 11 years; but primary grade children are relatively likely to use ethnocentric reasoning about foreign values and, generally, appear to need assistance in supporting predictions about values.